



SOFTWARE NEWS

■ ONSPEED ACCELERATES YOUR POCKET PC

OnSpeed has launched its internet acceleration software for the Pocket PC platform. Designed to work on any device running Windows Pocket PC 2003 or above, the software uses OnSpeed's servers to compress all received web traffic. This increases download times. GPRS and 3G users will be happy to know that it also reduces costs, as less bandwidth is used. The software is available for £25 per year from www.onspeed.com. We'll bring you a full review next month when we look at data costs.



■ WINDOWS XP UPDATE IMPROVES WIRELESS SECURITY

Microsoft has beefed up the security of Windows XP's wireless connections as a free update to Service Pack 2. As well as making it easier to connect to wireless hotspots, Microsoft says it has added support for WiFi Protected Access 2 (WPA2). The update can be obtained free from Microsoft's download site at www.microsoft.com/downloads.

■ SWEDISH TEEN ARRESTED OVER CISCO THEFT

The FBI has announced that Swedish authorities have arrested a teenager in connection with the alleged theft of Cisco source code in May last year. The Bureau says it is continuing to work with law enforcement agencies, including those in Britain, to determine whether the teenager worked alone or with accomplices.

Less than a year ago, a Russian security website reported that portions of Cisco's Internetwork Operating System (IOS) had appeared on an IRC channel. The code portions were from versions 12.3 and 12.3t of the OS.

Most of the world's internet routing is performed by Cisco hardware. A breach in security could, in theory, cause huge damage to some of the world's most critical networks. Someone who went by the name of Stakkato allegedly posted the 2.5MB portion of code to prove their claim that they had hacked into Cisco's network, something the networking giant denied at the time. The code disappeared from view soon after, though it appears that by then it had already fallen into the wrong hands.

However, it seems that law enforcement has caught up with the hackers. The FBI said, "The criminal activity has stopped". However, there is no certainty that other breaches based on the stolen code will not appear in the future.

REVIEW VIDEO-EDITING SOFTWARE

SONY Vegas 6 +DVD

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £440 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.sirentechology.co.uk

DETAILS www.mediasoftware.sonypictures.com



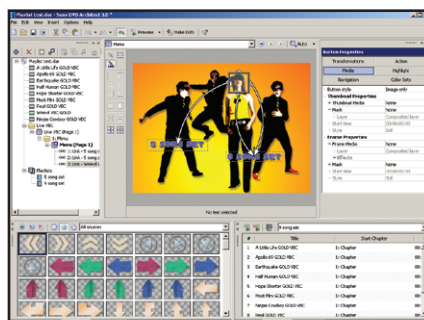
Last year Vegas 5 introduced a range of fun editing tools that beefed up its capabilities for video compositing. Vegas 6 takes a more sober tone to be taken seriously as a professional editing platform.

Top billing on Sony's list of new features is comprehensive high-definition video (HDV) support. Vegas was already capable of working with HDV, but version 6 adds the ability to capture directly from Sony and JVC HDV cameras via FireWire. We weren't able to test this, but Vegas handled HD file import, editing and export without problems. The only caveat is the inevitable extra processor load that HD video incurs. At least Vegas's preview quality settings allow the user to find their preferred balance of quality, resolution and frame rate while editing.

Vegas 6 also adds support for Blackmagic DeckLink cards, which provide SDI connections commonly used in professional editing environments for uncompressed digital video transfers. This allows Vegas to be used with professional video cameras and integrate with larger editing suites. Support for AAF files gives compatibility with Avid.

Despite such high aspirations, enthusiasts and business users haven't been forgotten. External monitor previews extend to dual computer monitor setups: one shows Vegas's interface and the other a full-screen preview. This is ideal for working with HD progressive scan video, but those working with interlaced DV footage can use it too, thanks to its new de-interlace option.

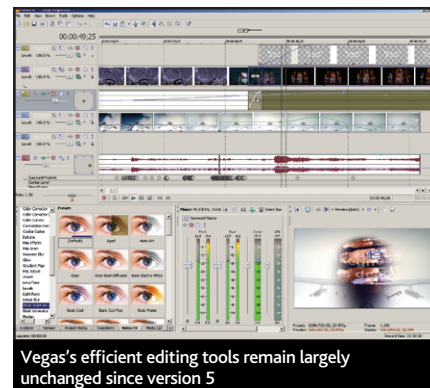
Other new features make Vegas faster to use than ever. The moving of objects on the timeline is



DVD Architect has plenty of new features, including a graphical representation for button navigation



Media Manager will keep all your media assets in order, as long as you put in the time to catalogue them



Vegas's efficient editing tools remain largely unchanged since version 5

accompanied by a time readout in seconds and frames, which comes in particularly useful when setting transition lengths. A Synchronise function provides a simple fix for when video and audio sync is lost. Nested sequencing is something Adobe Premiere users have enjoyed for some time, but now you can import Vegas project (.veg) files directly on to the timeline and treat them like any other clip. This is perfect for bringing together different parts of a large project without having to render them first.

VST audio plug-ins are now supported and effects can be applied per audio clip rather than per track. This ties up the loose ends from the last version, giving you an unbeatable set of audio tools. The Media Manager, which first appeared in Sony Acid Pro 5, turns up here to keep tabs on your library of video, audio and image files, although you'll have to invest some time into adding tags to files before it's particularly useful.

Vegas 6 is available by itself for £300 including VAT, but the +DVD Production Suite also includes a surround Dolby Digital encoder, a couple of useful effects plug-ins and DVD Architect, now at version 3. Like Vegas, this has been improved for professional use and includes support for dual-layer discs and DLT tape drives. Flags can be set for Context Scrambling System (CSS) and Macrovision encryption at a duplication facility, but Vegas can't perform CSS encryption itself.

Playlists are supported, but using a DVD player's Previous and Next chapter controls can upset their playback. However, the ability to lock certain remote control buttons provides a workaround. Multiple video angles are supported, and menu themes can be created from specially formatted Photoshop .psd files.

DVD Architect 3 has received a serious injection of power, and its ease of use confirms it as our favourite DVD-authoring package. Existing users who don't need HDV and SDI may not be able to justify the upgrade price of \$294 (around £154) for +DVD; they're high prices to pay for workflow improvements, although DVD Architect's new features are more tangible. But for new users, Vegas's sublime interface and lower price give it the edge over Adobe's Premiere.

Ben Pitt



A range of behind-the-scenes and workflow improvements



No new effects or other toys

REQUIREMENTS Windows 2000/XP, 800MHz processor, 256MB RAM (2.8GHz, 512MB recommended for HDV), 200MB disk space, DVD writer. Product code SON22359



REVIEW VIDEO-EDITING SOFTWARE

ULEAD VideoStudio 9

RATING ★★★★★

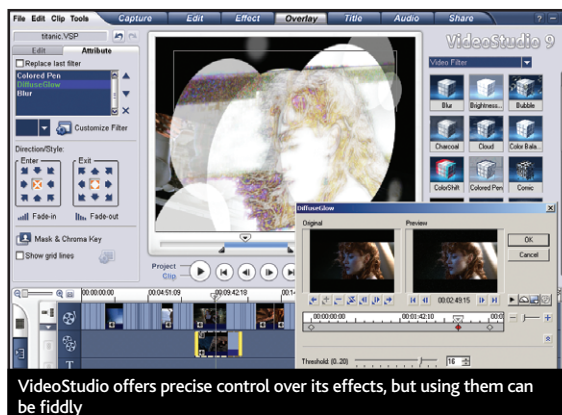
PRICE £45 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.amazon.co.ukDETAILS www.ulead.co.uk

VideoStudio was one of the first video editors aimed at home users. Nine versions on, it packs some powerful features. Key frame-based automation allows effects to change gradually over time, unlike many inexpensive editors. There's a great collection of transitions, effects and text animations, and VideoStudio's DVD authoring wizard is one of the best at this price.

This latest version comes with loads of new features. Chroma keying is available for overlaying clips using blue-screen techniques. It isn't easy to construct and correctly light a blue screen to make this work effectively, but it's fun to play with. It's also possible to pan and zoom across video clips, although this is presented differently to the pan and zoom introduced in version 8. Distort clip allows video to be stretched and skewed, but this is one of the few effects that can't be morphed over time. The most valuable of the new features is Auto Save, which successfully recovered our work on those occasions when VideoStudio crashed.

A new DV-to-DVD Wizard aims to make transfers from DV tape to DVD as simple as possible. Connect your camera via FireWire, click Quick Scan and the software zips through the tape in fast preview mode and identifies all the



VideoStudio offers precise control over its effects, but using them can be fiddly



The DVD-authoring wizard remains one of the highlights of the package

individual clips. Then you just pick the clips you want, choose a DVD menu template and leave the software to capture the required footage and burn it to DVD. It's a great idea, but it didn't work in our tests because Quick Scan thought our entire tape was one continuous clip. We also had problems

with scene detection when capturing at normal speed, although we saw the Quick Scan feature working in a demonstration by Ulead.

Little has been done to address existing problems with the software. There's a new zoom control that makes navigating the timeline slightly faster, but basic editing still feels cumbersome and there's a five-second delay between clicking Play and previews commencing. The layout of the interface is a mess. For instance, if you try to drag an effect from the library on the right to the list of used effects on the left, the left menu disappears. When applying multiple

effects to a clip, the pop-up preview shows the results of only one effect at a time. This window uses key frames for effects that change over time. This produces sophisticated results, but the small preview thumbnails make it quite difficult to use.

Ulead's strategy of stuffing each new release with new features is no longer enough to keep it competitive. VideoStudio is still a long way from the sheer power of Adobe Premiere Elements and it would take much reworking of the interface and preview engine to make it as easy to use.

Ben Pitt

✓ Feature packed; costs less than the competition

✗ Can be cumbersome and confusing

REQUIREMENTS Windows 98 SE/Me/2000/XP, Pentium III 800MHz, 256MB RAM (512MB recommended), 1.2GB disk space plus 4GB for video. **Product code** B0008F5V60

HOTLIST OFFICE SUITE

ABILITY SOFTWARE Ability Office 4

RATING ★★★★★

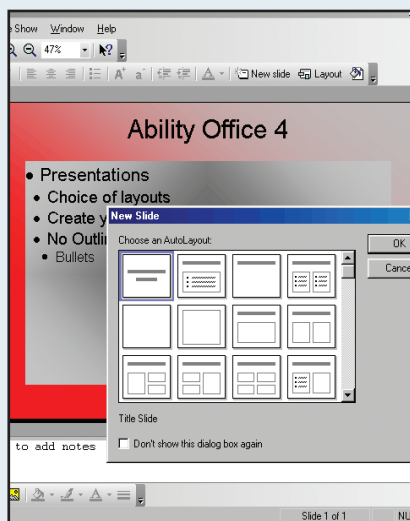
PRICE Professional Edition £50 inc VAT (upgrade £25); Standard/Small Business Edition £40 inc VAT (upgrade £20)

DETAILS www.ability.com

Buying an office suite doesn't necessarily mean spending a lot of money, as Ability shows us with its Office 4 suite. For just £50 for the Professional Edition, it undercuts the competition by a mile but still offers a functional package.

The latest version introduces the new Presentation program, which competes against Microsoft's PowerPoint. It's compatible with its competitor, bar a couple of features such as embedded video. This means that a few PowerPoint presentations won't open properly in Ability and you'll have to start your work from scratch. To facilitate this, Ability offers 20 slide layouts for slideshows.

The other big feature is Ability Mail. It's not included on the CD, but is available as a free download from the Ability website for registered users. It's the final piece in the puzzle for moving away from a Microsoft-based productivity suite.



Ability Office 4 also updates Ability Database. One of the strengths of the suite, the database now provides easier form design and reporting. Ability Write has the welcome additions of Autocorrect, Autotext and Grammar Checker. These features put the application on a par with Microsoft Word.

For the price it's very good value, although we recommend downloading the trial version to make sure all the features you need are present.

REQUIREMENTS Windows 98 SE/Me/2000/XP, Pentium processor, 64MB RAM, 100MB disk space

HOTLIST ENCYCLOPEDIA SOFTWARE



MICROSOFT Encarta 2005 Premium



RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £24 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.amazon.co.ukDETAILS www.microsoft.com

It might not have the same depth as other encyclopedias but Encarta's friendly interface and accessible information make it a real winner. It's the perfect companion for any parent, making learning fun for their kids. With a special Children's Edition in the box, younger children can also gain the benefit of this package.

REQUIREMENTS Windows 98 or above, 500MHz Pentium III, 128MB RAM, 250MB disk space. **Product code** 844-00762



REVIEW PHOTO-EDITING SOFTWARE

NOVA
DEVELOPMENT
Photo Explosion 2

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE Standard edition £25 inc VAT; Deluxe edition £40 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.pcwb.comDETAILS www.novadevelopment.co.uk

The shelves of computer stores are overflowing with low-cost photo-editing programs, and any new contenders need to offer something special to stand out. Photo Explosion is far from original. However, it's cheap and it throws in interesting extras in addition to the basic editing tools.

When you launch the program, its welcome screen provides three main options: Browse, Edit and Create Project. Selecting Browse opens a browser window similar to that of Windows Explorer, allowing you to locate any image files stored on your hard disk quickly. The browser displays thumbnail views of all your photographs, and also provides a number of batch processing options that let you adjust multiple images simultaneously. You can convert photos into different file formats and adjust settings such as brightness, contrast and colour balance. Unfortunately, there's no Undo command when you're altering multiple photos, so the only way to undo changes is to close the photos without saving them. This is a bit clumsy and Nova should provide an Undo option.

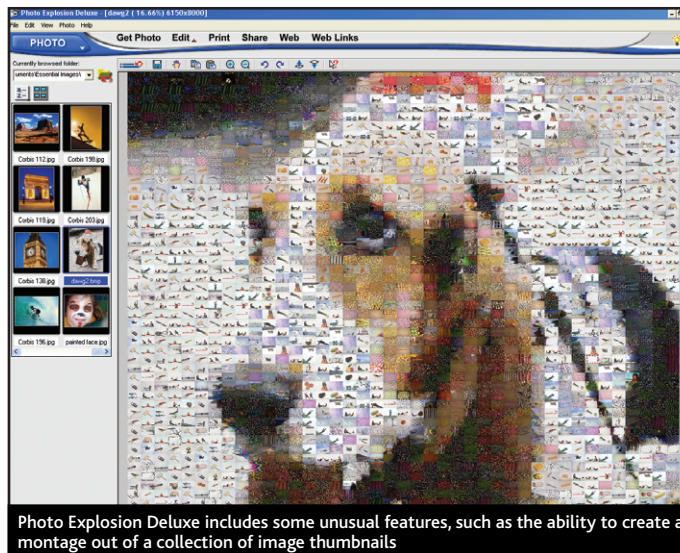


Photo Explosion Deluxe includes some unusual features, such as the ability to create a montage out of a collection of image thumbnails

Switching to Edit mode allows you to do more detailed work on individual photos. A menu bar at the top of the screen provides options such as Edit, Print and Share; clicking any of these activates a sub-menu containing additional options. The program provides a decent range of editing tools, with plenty of options for improving photo quality. Thankfully, there's a proper Undo command in this mode. The final option is to switch to Project mode, which provides you with templates for documents such as calendars, cards and CD labels.

The program's interface isn't sophisticated, but the main editing tools are all easy to use. You would be forgiven for thinking that Photo Explosion doesn't provide any features that can't be found in any photo-editing program. However, the Deluxe

edition of Photo Explosion includes a few useful extras.

We particularly like the MontagePlus program, which allows you to create a single large image from a collection of smaller images. There's also a tool called PhotoSplash, which can be used to transfer photos or slideshows on to mobile phones or PDAs. A morphing program is included that can merge photos together. However, these last three add-on programs are available only with the

Deluxe version of Photo Explosion. Neither version can match the sheer range of features found in more expensive rivals such as Adobe's Photoshop Elements. But Photo Explosion still provides a decent set of editing tools at a competitive price and it is a fine introduction to photo editing for beginners or users on a tight budget.

Cliff Joseph

✓ Good entry-level photo editing at an extremely affordable price

✗ No Undo command available during batch processing of multiple photos

REQUIREMENTS Windows 98 or later, 300MHz processor, 64MB RAM.
Product code NPNVAE000-P04

HOTLIST ANTI-VIRUS SOFTWARE

F-SECURE
Anti-Virus 2005

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £26 inc VAT

SUPPLIER F-Secure 01223 478800

DETAILS www.f-secure.com

One of the cheapest anti-virus products on the market, F-Secure's Anti-Virus is also one of the best. Its interface is clean and easy to use, and when we downloaded infected emails its pop-up listed the viruses but didn't halt the rest of the download.

With excellent detection across the board, it's great value for money and worthy of our Best Buy award.

REQUIREMENTS Windows 98 or above, Pentium II processor, 128MB RAM, 30MB disk space



HOTLIST DTP SOFTWARE

SERIF
PagePlus 10

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £100 inc VAT; £50 upgrade

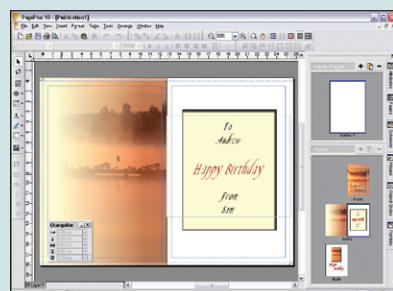
from any Serif product

SUPPLIER Serif 08003 767070

DETAILS www.serif.com

Serif's PagePlus 10 is aimed at the consumer who doesn't need the complexity of Adobe's InDesign. The latest version is even easier to use and allows anyone to create professional-looking publications. The price is similar to that of Microsoft's Publisher, but this product remains our favourite.

REQUIREMENTS Windows 98 or above, Pentium processor, 256MB RAM, 300MB disk space. **Product code** B0002TS2Y



HOTLIST DOCUMENT CONVERTER

ABBYY
Scan to Office 1.0

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £28 inc VAT

SUPPLIER Abbyy 01279 656539

DETAILS www.abbyy.co.uk

Abbyy's Scan to Office 1.0 lets you scan text and images and see the results in Microsoft's Office or your email program. It worked remarkably well in our tests, dealing with even the most complex of documents.

Considering the low price, this is the easiest and most economical way to get paper documents on to your computer.

REQUIREMENTS Windows 98 or above, Pentium processor, 150MB disk space, Office 2000 or above





REVIEW OCR SOFTWARE

IRIS
ReadIRIS Pro 10

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £72 inc VAT

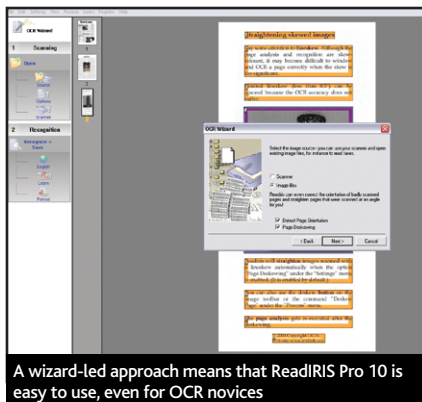
SUPPLIER www.pcwb.comDETAILS www.irislink.com

To convert a printed document into an editable format, you need optical character recognition (OCR) software. This software recognises the characters that make up the printed page and turns the whole thing into an editable digital file.

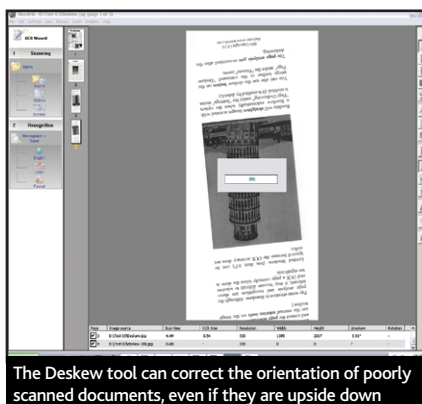
Most scanners come with a basic OCR package, but these are often slow and don't offer the range of features you can get with a professional package such as ReadIRIS Pro 10. Belgian firm IRIS has been in the OCR business for years; you may well have got one of its earlier or 'lite' products bundled with your scanner.

ReadIRIS Pro 10 is the company's most recent OCR package and has all the finesse you would expect from a company with this much experience. IRIS claims that the software is easy to use and fast in action, and it is true to its word. Even on complex, multipage documents it speeds through the OCR process. It's much faster than other OCR products we've seen.

Despite its wide range of features and sophisticated capabilities, this program is very user-friendly. For OCR novices there is a wizard that makes the whole process simple. Just select from the options provided, and it does the whole job for you. If you're a more experienced user, there are



A wizard-led approach means that ReadIRIS Pro 10 is easy to use, even for OCR novices



The Deskwizard tool can correct the orientation of poorly scanned documents, even if they are upside down

plenty of ways to tweak the software in order to get it to do exactly what you want.

The user interface has been updated and given an Office 2003-style feel. The range of files it recognises has also been increased to include JPEG

2000 and DejaVu files. It can also output to the XML-based Microsoft Office format, WordML. It includes tools for business card and barcode recognition, which are handy in a business environment. It also offers good PDF support, with four types of PDF output available.

The main new feature is the much-vaunted handprint recognition, which aims to turn handwritten notes into text. This is a great idea, as we would all love to be able to input our notes into a computer and have them converted to text. Sadly, the vagaries of the human hand left the software stumped. For starters, you have to write in a very unnatural way to give the program any chance of recognising your scribbles. It can't handle joined-up writing or lower-case letters, only separated block capitals. Even then, the program has trouble recognising handwritten text with any accuracy. It's a shame this feature doesn't live up to the hype, but the task of turning human handwriting into digital text is a complex one as people don't tend to write the same letters the same way every time.

ReadIRIS Pro 10 is an impressive program, though, and if you need to use OCR for your business the price isn't unreasonable. However, home users will probably find that the extras such as barcode scanning and WordML support are unnecessary.

Sam Ellis



Fast recognition speeds; intuitive user interface



Handwriting recognition doesn't live up to the hype; overkill for home users

REQUIREMENTS Pentium processor; 64MB RAM; 120MB disk space; Windows 98 or above. **Product code** IRISOCR1

HOTLIST CREATIVE & DESIGN SOFTWARE

ADOBE
Creative Suite 2

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE Standard edition £786 inc VAT

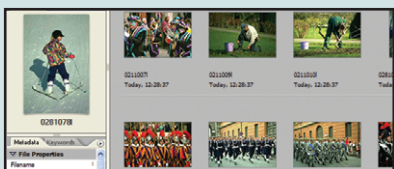
(upgrade £375); Premium edition £1,040 inc VAT (upgrade £500)

SUPPLIER Adobe 0131 458 6842

DETAILS www.adobe.co.uk

Creative Suite 2 is a superb bundle of high-end products, including Photoshop, InDesign and Live Trace. Each product's features complement each other and they are all neatly tied together under a single interface. Each application also features a range of new tools such as Photoshop's Vanishing Point tool, which makes photo editing in perspective much easier. This suite is great value compared to the standalone prices.

REQUIREMENTS Windows 2000 or XP with QuickTime 6.5, 500MHz processor (1GHz recommended), 384MB RAM (1GB recommended), 2.5GB disk space



HOTLIST VIDEO-EDITING SOFTWARE

ADOBE
Premiere Elements

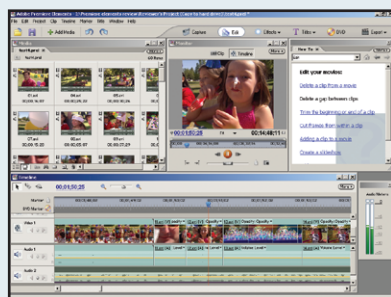
RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £53 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.savastore.comDETAILS www.adobe.co.uk

Premiere Elements is a cut-down version of the professional Premiere Pro video-editing application. It offers many of the same tools, and it's a powerful editing package. It is leagues ahead of other cheap editors and well worth buying if you have a DV camera and want to turn your footage into something special.

REQUIREMENTS Windows XP with SP1, 800MHz Pentium III or Athlon XP, 256MB RAM, 1.2GB disk space. **Product code** 25530008



HOTLIST HOSTING PACKAGE

1and1
Microsoft Home

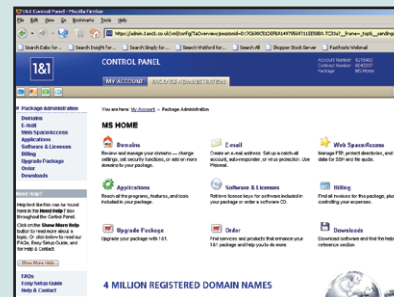
RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £5.86 per month, £70 a year

DETAILS www.1and1.co.uk

If you want to run a website above and beyond the simple web space that you get with your ISP, you'll need a dedicated hosting package such as 1and1's Microsoft Home. You get 800MB of web space, 10GB of data transfers a month, a free .co.uk domain name and 300 email addresses. This web hosting pack, with its simple control panel and bundled scripts, is excellent value.

REQUIREMENTS Internet access, web browser





REVIEW IMAGE MANAGER

ALLUME Personal Image Manager

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £30 inc VAT

SUPPLIER Koch Media 08700 279871

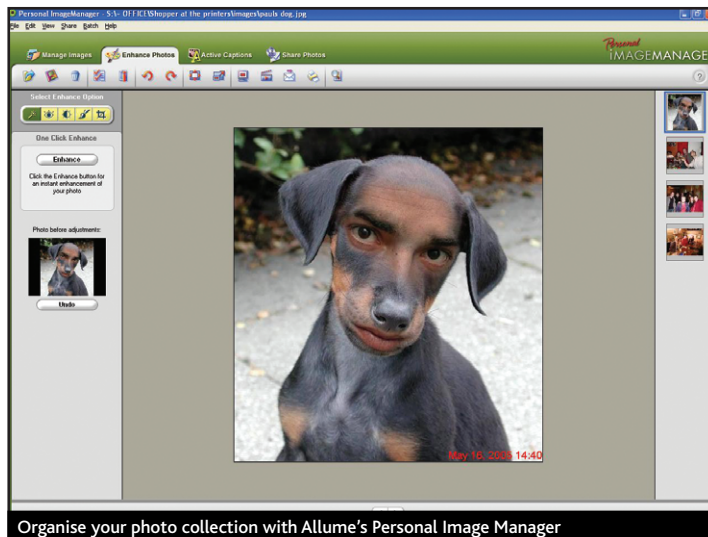
DETAILS www.kochmedia.com

Digital cameras have made the job of organising pictures far more difficult so it's no wonder that hundreds of tools have appeared claiming to help you get your snaps in order.

Allume's Personal Image Manager is the latest program designed to help you organise your photographs and it aims to be both powerful and easy to use. It is user-friendly from the outset. The Quick-start Wizard takes you through the initial steps of organising your pictures. If you prefer, you can just browse through your hard disk manually.

For each folder you select, a set of thumbnails is displayed. These can be resized depending on how many images you want to be able to view at once. Selecting one or more images lets you perform rotations and batch conversions of file formats.

This software can also help you order photographs. It allows you to add pictures to a category and create collections. Collections occupy a small box at the bottom of the screen and are populated by dragging and dropping pictures. While this makes it easy to create a collection for your summer holiday, say, the view had some problems. First, it's very small and you can't resize the box. Second, you lose the filename from the side. There's also no way to view a particular category within a specific collection.



Organise your photo collection with Allume's Personal Image Manager

You can search by category in the application and in Windows by using the right-click context-sensitive menu. Even so, it's not as flexible as ACDSee, a similarly priced program that uses a larger preview window, enabling you to view pictures by collection and category easily.

Personal Image Manager isn't just about managing pictures, though. It also has some basic editing tools. Just click on the Enhance Photos tab and you can crop, remove red eye and automatically correct the contrast and brightness of a picture. The tools are basic but cover a lot of ground and, more importantly, they work at the touch of a button.

Allume has also introduced Active Captions, a tool that lets you add captions, date stamps and clip art to photographs. But these additions are

separate objects that aren't saved in the picture file. You can choose whether or not you wish to view them in the Personal Image Manager. Default settings such as red text look a bit amateurish, but you can change and improve them.

Finally, you can share your photographs, as the program gives you the option to email, print, send to Pocket PC, burn to video CD or even create a web page. It's simple to

use and will be helpful to anyone who struggles to find ways of showing off their pictures.

For the price, this program gives you a lot of features that are easy to get to grips with. However, the photo management facility is a little simplistic. Anyone who wants more control will find ACDSee 7 far more accommodating.

David Ludlow

✓ Easy to use; integrates with Windows

✗ Collection view is very small

REQUIREMENTS Windows 98 or above, Pentium processor, 32MB RAM, 80MB disk space. **Product code** 7-1710310129-8

HOTLIST STEREO AUDIO EDITOR

SONY Sound Forge 7

RATING ★★★★★

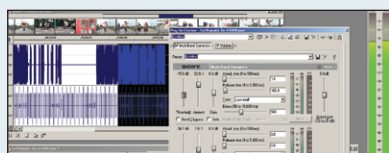
PRICE £294 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.mmdirect.co.ukDETAILS mediasoftware.sonypictures.com

Sound Forge has played a central role in many computer-based recording studios for over a decade. This latest version packs plenty of improvements that boost its value as a mastering tool and ensure it's also useful during video-editing tasks.

The interface is more elegant and powerful, while the plug-in effects can be automated over time. With the inclusion of CD Architect 5 and Noise Reduction 2, Sound Forge 7 is a fantastic suite for preparing finished mixes for public consumption.

REQUIREMENTS Windows 2000/XP, 400MHz processor, 128MB RAM, 60MB disk space. **Product code** B000WDXHA



HOTLIST WEB BROWSER

MOZILLA Firefox 1.0

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE Free

SUPPLIER www.firefox.com

Firefox 1.0 is by far the best web browser we've ever used. Introducing advanced features such as tabbed browsing and support for RSS feeds, it is leaps and bounds ahead of Internet Explorer. When you also consider that it's better at rendering pages and is more secure, there's little excuse not to use it.

REQUIREMENTS Windows 98 or above, 500MHz Pentium processor, 128MB RAM, 52MB disk space



HOTLIST UTILITIES SUITE

SYMANTEC SystemWorks 2005

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £45 inc VAT

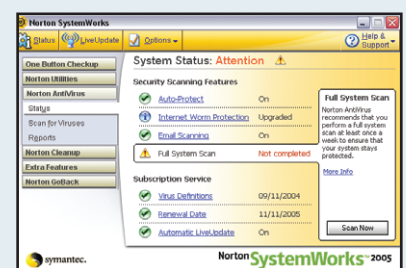
SUPPLIER Symantec 01628 592222

DETAILS www.symantec.co.uk

Keeping your PC running properly is a difficult task made a lot easier by SystemWorks. A One Button Checkup feature gives your PC a thorough examination and fixes any problems it comes across.

With Norton AntiVirus to protect your PC and GoBack 4.0 to make regular backups, PC woes can be fixed quickly and efficiently.

REQUIREMENTS Windows 98 or above, 180MB disk space, IE 5.5 or above. **Product code** B0002TSZ2Y





REVIEW VOICE-TO-TEXT SOFTWARE

SPINVOX
Voice Powered Text

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £5 per month for 20 messages

DETAILS www.spinvox.com

Voicemail can be very annoying. If you're not struggling to take down a phone number, you're somewhere that's too loud to hear properly or you don't have good enough reception. Using SpinVox's new voice-to-text software, you can get round these problems and have your messages converted to text and sent via SMS.

This works with any mobile network by redirecting your voicemail to the SpinVox service. Messages are converted automatically and it works really well. The conversion is impeccable, missing only the occasional word. When it does miss a word, it inserts a blank in the message or takes a stab at the word it thinks the caller said and puts a question mark after it. In all cases, we understood the content of a message.

The service is clever because it uses the caller's phone number as the sender of a text. So when you get a converted SMS, your phone looks up the number in its address book to display the caller's name. It also makes it easy to dial that person back or send an SMS to them. As most mobile networks have a text-to-voice service, you can text a message back to landlines.

The default service records messages up to 30 seconds long, but you can change this to three minutes. You can also turn on email to receive your messages in your inbox.

To listen to the original message, you have a voicemail number and can skip to a message using the Quick-Link code sent in the SMS message. However, as it's a regular phone number you'll be billed at standard rates.

We were really impressed with this service. Receiving all our messages as texts was much easier than using standard voicemail. For £5 a month you get 20 conversions, though there are other service plans available for heavy users.

David Ludlow

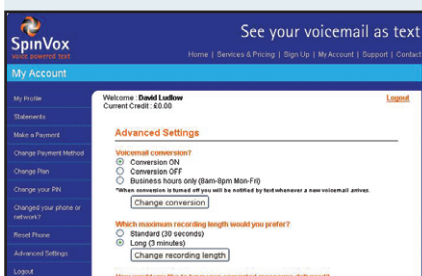


Excellent voice conversion; can use email too



You have to pay standard rates to listen to voicemail

REQUIREMENTS Mobile phone and contract; internet connection to manage account online



SpinVox turns your voicemail messages into text messages so you won't miss a thing

REVIEW ADDRESS MANAGEMENT SOFTWARE

POSTCODE
ANYWHERE
Desktop Client

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £160 inc VAT

DETAILS www.postcodeanywhere.com

If you deal with lots of addresses and regularly take orders over the phone, you'll know how frustrating it is to have to type every line and aurally verify the information. Postcode Anywhere takes some of the strain out of this with its Desktop Client.

This program sits in your System Tray and monitors what you type, looking for postcodes. When it detects one, the client springs into life and sends a query over the internet to Postcode Anywhere's servers. The results fly back amazingly quickly, giving you a list of matching addresses. Double-click the relevant one and it's pasted into the open application. It's fast and accurate, even listing company names. And as it pastes into the open application, it can integrate with your custom ordering system, or just take the strain out of entering addresses into Outlook.

The software also integrates with Excel and Access. You can record a template telling the software which fields or cells you want the address to go in. However, you have to be careful when recording the macro; using the mouse or pressing the Shift key stops data being recorded. Once done properly, it works seamlessly and is bound to save a lot of time for small businesses.

The search tool can be used individually to look up an address based on a postcode, company name or street address. Once you've found the address, the standard short cut copy and paste keys don't work, so you have to use the Copy address option from the Tools menu.

Aside from the occasional out-of-date record – Dennis Publishing still has an entry for its old building as well as the new one, for example – the search tool is fast and accurate. It's expensive, but a one-off payment gives you 1,000 look-ups a day. The Desktop Client is a tidy way of improving address management and taking orders.

David Ludlow



Integrates with existing applications



Macro recording can be problematic

REQUIREMENTS Windows 98 or above, 250MHz Pentium processor, 128MB RAM, 6MB disk space



Let Postcode Anywhere take the strain of checking postcodes and addresses for you

REVIEW HANDHELD TRANSLATION SOFTWARE

IRIS
IRISPen Executive
Translator

RATING ★★

PRICE £140 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.softjam.co.ukDETAILS www.irislink.com

If you regularly work with documents written in a foreign language, you would probably love a simple way of translating them. The IRISPen Executive Translator is a combination of handheld pen scanner and translation software that converts text from a variety of languages.

When you first install the software, you decide which pair of languages you want to use. The program offers six translation pairs and translates in nine different directions, for example, English to French, German, Spanish, Russian or Portuguese. But you can only choose one pairing and if you change your mind, you have to reinstall the software.

There are two ways to get translations: use the handheld scanner provided to scan in text, or translate from within Windows applications. Sadly, results with the scanner were poor. Handheld scanners are hard to run straight so scanned text is wobbly and the software had a hard time working out what we scanned in English, let alone translating it into French.

The instruction on how to translate from a Windows application was sketchy, as were all the instructions. When we finally cracked it, the results were better and the translation was accurate. But we think the complicated process and poor instructions will leave many users confused. There are free translation tools for a small amount of text on the web such as BabelFish, and these allow you to choose any two of a number of languages for translation.

The handheld scanner is hard to use accurately, making the translation software's job nearly impossible. For these reasons, the IRISPen seems like an expensive waste of time and we find it hard to recommend.

Sam Ellis

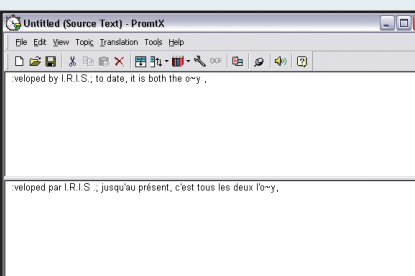


Fast scanning; translation within any Windows application



Expensive; poor accuracy

REQUIREMENTS Windows 2000/XP, 800MHz Pentium processor, 256MB RAM, 500MB disk space



The poor quality of IRISPen's handheld scans makes translation patchy and inaccurate

REVIEW SUMMARY SOFTWARE

CORPORA Summarize!

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £240 inc VAT for 10 licences

SUPPLIER Corpora Software 01483 549055

DETAILS www.corporasoftware.com

When faced with a long document, finding all the important facts can be a tedious process. Corpora hopes to change this with its Summarize! software. This program reads through a document and presents a short summary and a list of keywords. It supports Word, PDF, text and web documents and even Outlook emails. We tested it on some long documents and were impressed with the results.

The software understands the English language and knows about context, so it returns readable results rather than a count of how many times a word appears; we tried it on the Hutton Enquiry and it pulled out most of the relevant information and keywords.

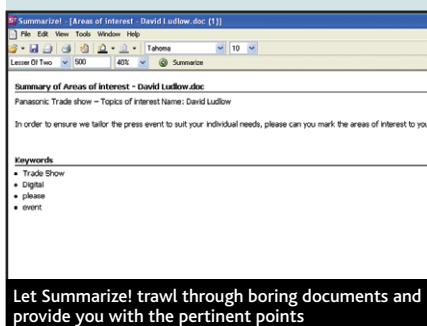
You can ask for the summary length as a word count or percentage of the original document. Depending on the size and complexity of the document, you'll have to change these settings.

The default settings produce a standard summary based on what the software thinks is important, which can lead to poor results. However, you can define profiles, allowing you to choose a set of keywords. The software then favours these words in its search and produces a summary that matches your needs. It's particularly useful for people who work in the legal profession, where a document needs to be checked thoroughly for certain clauses.

The integration with Outlook is a useful feature, too. Unfortunately, the security settings mean you have to allow access to each email manually. Annoyingly, it also starts a new instance of itself for every email you check.

While the results and speed are impressive, the price is prohibitive. Still, if you work with a lot of large documents, this is an effective way of getting at the information they contain.

David Ludlow

 Condenses large documents to readable chunks; understands context Minimum purchase of 10 licences**REQUIREMENTS** Microsoft Windows 2000/XP, Pentium II 450MHz, 12MB disk space, 128MB RAM

Let Summarize! trawl through boring documents and provide you with the pertinent points

REVIEW OPERATING SYSTEM

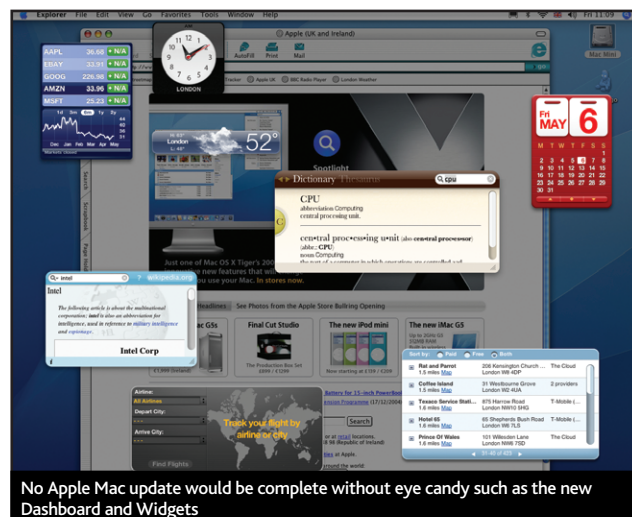
APPLE Mac OS X 10.4

RATING ★★★★★

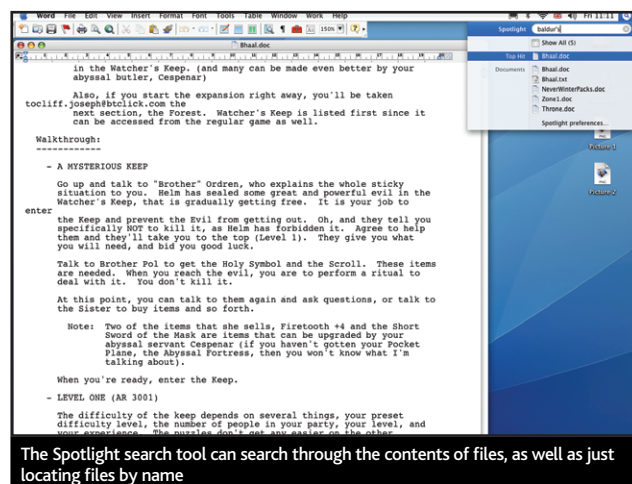
PRICE Single-user edition £90 inc VAT;

Five-user family pack £140 inc VAT

SUPPLIER The Apple Store 08000 391010

DETAILS www.apple.co.uk

No Apple Mac update would be complete without eye candy such as the new Dashboard and Widgets



The Spotlight search tool can search through the contents of files, as well as just locating files by name

Apple is on a roll. The iPod is selling in its millions and Mac sales are up, thanks to new models such as the low-cost Mac mini. To top it all off, it has released a major new upgrade to the Mac OS. The program's full name is the rather longwinded Mac OS X version 10.4, but Apple prefers to call it Tiger, following on from previous upgrades Panther and Jaguar.

Tiger seems to be an extremely polished upgrade. It has been available for a while as we write this and there have been no last-minute bug fixes, patches or security updates. Installation is straightforward, as the installer program can update your existing OS X software without affecting any other applications or files stored on your Mac. Once installed, Tiger seems to run just as fast as the previous version of the Mac OS, so you shouldn't need to upgrade your existing Mac.

This leaves you free to concentrate on exploring the long list of new features. The Mac OS is based on UNIX, so there are a few obscure

technical updates, including fine grain locking, access control lists and 64-bit virtual memory. But the Mac is known for its eye-catching graphical interface, and that's where all the fun features are to be found. The biggest bit of eye candy is the Dashboard, a transparent screen layer that can be used to hold a series of Widgets. These Widgets are small programs that perform specific tasks such as checking share prices, the weather or train timetables. The Dashboard is invisible most of the time, but when you press a specific user-definable

key it pops up on the screen, hovering above the normal desktop display and showing all your Widgets at the same time. Once you've got the information you want from the Widgets, just hit the same key again to return to the normal screen display.

Another impressive new feature is the Automator which, as the name suggests, is used to automate repetitive tasks. The Automator provides you with a series of predefined commands known as actions. These actions can be used to issue commands to the Mac OS or to specific programs, such as Apple's Address Book and Mail programs. You could, for example, use one action to check the Address Book for people who have birthdays coming up and another to launch Mail and send them a birthday email message.

Another handy automation tool lets you use the Safari web browser to round up internet RSS news feeds and create a personalised news page with all the latest stories from the news services you choose.

The feature Apple seems to be making the most fuss about is Spotlight, the new desktop search tool. As well as searching for files by name, this can also read files and locate

information contained inside the files. It can locate text stored within PDF files and check the metadata or key words associated with digital photographs or audio and video clips.

As always, Apple is guilty of indulging in graphical elements for the sake of it and some features, such as the Widgets, could have been implemented in a more straightforward manner. But there's no doubt that Tiger is an impressive upgrade. Having said that, while there's enough for any Mac user to warrant an upgrade, it's a shame it has to be paid for.

Cliff Joseph

 Impressive update with dozens of new features that will appeal to all Mac users Not a free update**REQUIREMENTS** 300MHz G3 processor and built-in FireWire, 256MB RAM, 3GB disk space